

MY GREAT-UNCLE'S DOUBLE.

After his ninety-first birthday my great-uncle William seemed, all of a sudden, to discover his great age, and to feel the weight of his many years. The wonderful health which he had always enjoyed broke down, he grew thin and he lost stature. My father had secretly given his tailor instructions to make the old gentleman's new dressing gown two inches shorter than the last one, for he was ever treading on its edges and stumbling. The old man lost his interest, too, in one thing after another of the many that had never hitherto ceased to engage his attention. His favorite books lay unregarded on his knees, and his remarkable gift of narration—he was a rare story-teller, graphic, rapid, thrilling—deserted him. And he slept more and more; slept late in the mornings, after his usual time for rising, slept longer than ever in the afternoons, and yet fell asleep again immediately after dinner. My uncle Owen, the philologist, quoted Richard Rolle de Hampole,

"An old man to dole drawand
May not wake, but as his stepand."
And my father talked about "the thirteenth climacteric," and all of us, nephews and nieces, great-nephews and nieces and great-grand-nephews and nieces, felt very sorry for what we could see was coming, for we were all deeply attached to the dear old man.

I say this by way of preface, in order that those who prefer to explain such phenomena as I am going to relate as the mere waking dreams of an old, old man, fast sinking beneath the spell of the last great sleep, may do so if they choose. My own opinion—but that is no part of my story.

When the spring came the medical man recommended a change of air—the Berkshire pine country. So my great-uncle went into Berkshire, and I with him. I was his favorite great-nephew, and do not mind confessing that I was proud of it. The change of air did the old man good. Our lodgings were comfortable, and the weather fine. My uncle recovered some of his old spirits and was able to take several "constitutional."

One afternoon as we returned from our walk our landlord met us at the door, and, touching his forehead, said to my uncle: "I beg your pardon, sir, but there's an old lady here who would much like to speak to you, if you have a few minutes to spare, sir. It is my grandmother."

My uncle assented, and we followed our host into his wife's parlor. As we entered, a great old woman, withered old dame rose from her place by the fire and courtesied to us.

"You don't remember me, sir," she said to my uncle as soon as he had sat down. "But I remember you, sir. It was Miss Jessy's maid, sir, at Northbrook. Do you remember, sir, in 1814?"

My uncle looked up quickly. "Yes, sir," answered the old dame, with a smile of pleasure at finding herself remembered. "I recollect your coming to Northbrook, sir, in 1814, in the Easter week. And when my grandson told me that a gentleman of the name of Gilson was come to stay with him, I thought at once of you, sir. And then, when I saw you in church last Sunday, I said, 'Why, that is the very same Mr. Gilson, now, I'm sure.' But," she concluded deferentially, "you're grown in years, sir."

"Well," thought I, "since 1814, naturally." But I was listening with great curiosity. For all of us knew that my great-uncle William had a secret, though what the nature of that secret was no one had any idea. Only my father had heard from his father that some fifty or sixty years since, Uncle William would, now and then, in conversation with his elder brother Dick, obliquely allude to a certain Jessy, respecting whom Uncle Dick was always profoundly reticent. My great-uncle Dick's death took place in the twenties, I have forgotten when, and since that Uncle William had never named Jessy. But now it seemed probable that I might hear something about this mysterious lady.

"And where are you now living, Ann?" asked my great-uncle.

"The old woman replied that she still lived at Northbrook. My uncle went on to ask about her history. I began to believe that, after all, he meant nothing to be said about "Miss Jessy." But presently he inquired:

"And the old place at Northbrook, 'The Cottage,' and the garden, and the glebe, and the rookery, do they all remain the same?"

"They built some new houses in the garden of 'The Cottage' some ten years back, sir," answered the old woman. "And after that they pulled 'The Cottage' down. But the glebe, and the rookery, they remain the same still."

A full minute passed before my uncle spoke again.

"And Miss Gwynne," he asked without any apparent emotion, "she married? She is not alive now, I suppose? You and I have lived to be such old folks, Ann, that there is scarcely any one whom we knew left."

"Ah, no, sir," answered the old dame dreamily. "No, Miss Jessy, sir, died in 1819. You never heard of it?"

"1819?" exclaimed my uncle. "But she was married only in—"

"In 1817, sir, in June, three years and two months after you came," she said.

"Yes, yes; I know it was about that time," answered my uncle, with something like a shade of impatience.

I was impressed by the way in which the old dame dated the marriage from the time of my uncle's visit.

"You never came again, sir," she ventured to remark now, finding that my uncle asked no more questions.

"No, my uncle admitted, he had not called again.

"Miss Jessy used to say, sir, that you would come some day. 'Some day, Ann, some day,' she used to say to me. 'You'll see, Ann, that some day Mr. Gilson will come again.'"

"Tell me about her marriage," said my uncle, changing the subject. "She married a Mr. Morgan?"

"Yes, sir. After all, she married Mr. Morgan Morgan. It was to Mrs. Morgan's, his mother's, that she went to dinner that day you came, sir. Perhaps you remember."

"I remember that she went to dine with some friends. I had forgotten who they were," replied my uncle. "But tell me how all this happened—Miss Gwynne's marriage, and the cause of her early death."

tainly come. And sometimes she would weep on returning home without having seen him. At other times she would sit for hours at a window at the back of "The Cottage," watching the path by which he should arrive. All this the old woman related a little reticently and hesitatingly, but what she meant was clear. Plainly, some time or another my great-uncle William had fallen in love with Miss Gwynne, and his regard had been, at least in a degree, returned. Not having seen the young lady for three or four months he had paid her this visit at Northbrook on his way home from Oxford at Easter in 1814; and after that visit, whatever my uncle's feelings may have been, Miss Gwynne's sentiment was that she would very much like him to come; leave her again. And so, the wish fathering the thought, she believed that he would come.

But to resume the old dame's story. The days and the months passed, and my great-uncle came not. Meantime, at Northbrook, lived a Mr. Morgan, a rival, apparently, of my uncle's, who, at any rate, was always on the spot. And then it seems, in the course of time, Jessie Gwynne grew tired of waiting for my uncle who never came back. Anyhow, Morgan, Morgan's suit, ever warmly pressed, began to obtain a hearing, and at last one day Ann learned from her young mistress that she had promised Mr. Morgan that she would marry him. Miss Gwynne's parents, however, would not hear of the match, and the young lady was forbidden to meet her lover. But one morning, when Ann went to awaken her, Miss Gwynne was nowhere to be found, and on the next day came a letter announcing that she and Morgan Morgan were married.

The young people went to London to live, and for a year or two all went well. Mr. Morgan made money, and the old people at "The Cottage" forgave their daughter, and she had a grand house, and there were balls and dinners and parties and gaieties every day. Then trouble began—the troubles the old folks had always foretold. Mr. Morgan was in debt. Mr. Morgan gambled. Mr. Morgan took to hard drinking. Mr. Morgan grew tired of his young wife; neglected her; was unkind; but he, being a miser, was cruelly. Then followed some episode over which a veil was thrown; the truth about it was never known; but Mr. Morgan wrote to the old people at "The Cottage" to inquire that his wife had left his house.

After that terrible month, he came back a blank. Mr. Morgan was in prison, and Mrs. Morgan was only the Lord knew where. Her parents sought for her far and near, but all in vain.

But at last, one evening, after "The Cottage" had been locked up for the night and every one in it had gone to bed, Ann was dozing off to sleep, she heard some one tapping, tapping against the shutter of the kitchen window, just beneath her room. At first she was frightened, and went down stairs, and softly opened the front door and called.

Outside was Mrs. Morgan.

"No, no, Ann; let me in the back way. I am not fit to enter my father's house by the front door," she insisted.

So Ann let her in by the kitchen door, as she wished. She had nothing on her head, and was looking miserably ill.

"I have come home to die, Ann," she said, choking over the words. "I have come home to die, Ann," she said, choking over the words. "I have come home to die, Ann," she said, choking over the words.

"She would not have Ann arouse either her father or father. But she said she would sit by the kitchen fire, the embers of which still glowed in the grate. It was as much as she could do to walk the length of the little room. When she reached the fireside she staggered at a chair, and sank into it, and seemed to Ann to have a sort of fit.

Then, recovering herself a little, she said, "Only just in time, Ann. Only just in time."

Ann stood looking at her, bewildered, not knowing what to do.

But Mrs. Morgan spoke again: "Has father grieved much, Ann? Tell him—you must tell him—that—that I—"

She gave a sort of groan, and fell off the chair on to the floor, and lay quite still.

"She was dead."

"They buried her in the churchyard," continued the old dame, "but the person would not let them put up any stone, because of what the doctor said. Though what that was I never heard. But it broke the old people's hearts."

All my uncle said was, "My God! My God!"

He shook hands with the old woman, and gave her a sovereign, and told her that he would not forget her, and I took her address.

During the rest of that day and the whole of the morrow my uncle was taciturn. On the third day he said to me, "Bob, we will drive over to Northbrook. It is not far."

"I was supposed to dissuade him, for I could not see that the expedition would do him any good. But he had set his heart upon it. So the next morning we went."

During the whole of our drive my uncle spoke only once, and then rather to himself, as it were, than to me. "To Northbrook once more, after all, and, as Jessy said, unexpectedly." After we had driven some eight miles we turned into a country lane. As we approached the brow of a hill my uncle said: "Tell the driver to stop. We will wait here for the rest of the way. The carriage can join us at the church."

We alighted and proceeded on foot. A slight ascent soon brought us to the crown of the hill. My uncle stopped, and resting both his hands on his stick planted before him, seemed to reflect upon his reminiscences of the view. Before us, on the slope of the hill, lay a little country town. Toward one end of it stood a fine old church, with a low square tower, rising among some trees. Near the church we could see a few houses of a modern date. As we turned toward the church, a path across the fields seemed to lead from the lane to the church.

My uncle took my arm again, and we went on. When we reached the path across the fields he said: "We go this way."

"You were familiar with this part of the country once, uncle?" I asked.

"No, I never came here but once, Bob. Only once—seventy years ago!"

"When he stopped me again."

"Well," he said, "here you can just see a little wicket, and then the path turns under the trees."

That was so. I suppose the old gentleman stood at this spot quite five minutes. We went on again, this time as far as the wicket. There we made a similar halt. My uncle laid his hand on the little wooden gate.

"This cannot be the same gate," he said musingly. "Ah, no; the bars used to be of three-way."

The old woman led us across the churchyard. And as we followed her tottering steps I could not help thinking of the Ann my uncle had been describing to me the previous evening, a bright, saucy-eyed serving girl.

"This is a mound next against a buttress," said the old dame as we picked our way amidst the graves along the wall of the church. "The third buttress from the end. The old gentleman used to come and lean his arm against the buttress and cry."

We were close to the third buttress. My uncle took off his hat, and the spring breeze played in his few thin white hairs. Only against the third buttress there was no mound, but a big altar-tomb in good repair, with the dates 1789, 1799, 1803 heavily re-inscribed on it.

Leaning on my arm, my uncle stood silent, trembling slightly. His eyes were fixed upon the old woman, who was looking puzzled.

"I've come to poor Miss Jessy's grave so often," she said meditatively. "I go to it now, the pointing out the tombstones is always here. It is the one next to this."

She led us on to the next buttress. There was a little chantry door near it.

"No," she said again; "it was not here by the door. It must have been the other way, the second door, and the second, I know. Perhaps 'twas the fourth."

"How long is it since you came to Mrs. Morgan's grave?" asked my uncle. He had put on his hat.

"The old dame shook her head. "I used to come very often, sir, at first," she answered slowly. "But the last time—well, sir, 'tis many years ago. But," she resumed, more quickly, "I'm sure I haven't forgotten. It's not by the fourth buttress it must be by the fifth, for I'm near certain upon the second wall upon it."

"She has forgotten, Bob," said my uncle gently. "Let us go."

So we returned to the carriage. Taking a last look at the gray old church my uncle sighed, "Poor Jessy!" and then drove away.

In my letters home I said nothing about our visit to Northbrook. I had no instructions to that effect from my uncle, but I could divine the old gentleman's wishes.

However, as I had anticipated, his visit to Northbrook did him no good. He became restless, and before the end of the next week we returned home. His arrival there entirely upset him. After dinner he expressed a wish to be alone, and left me to attend to the second course. At half-past eleven, having heard no news, he heard anything of him, we became anxious and went to seek him.

We found him in the chair in which we had left him, apparently unable to rise. He would not let me in, and gave me no sign of life until I had shown him to understand that something had happened which he was unable to explain. But he was annoyed at our having come. We were naturally alarmed and persuaded him to spend the next day in bed and to see the doctor. He had happened we never were able to find out, but it was some time before the old gentleman left his room. When he was a little better his old friend, the Dowager Countess of K— sent him an invitation to spend a fortnight with her in Warwickshire. The Countess was a widow, and had a subject of a recent murder in a certain noble French family. All our little party that afternoon assembled on the terrace, sitting under the shade of the trees, whose foliage spread above us dark against the deep blue sky, for it was now high summer. Many things were said about the murder, and some remarked how dreadful it was that it should be possible for a man at the end of a long, innocent and honorable life, to commit so great a crime.

The old Countess shrugged her shoulders. "A great crime at the end of an innocent and honorable life," she remarked incredulously. "You young people believe in it? I dare say you do. The world grows crazier and crazier every day. All gone crazy about education. And you young folks know nothing about great crimes. A man's great crime is committed before he is one and twenty."

And how the old noblewoman looked at him and nodded to herself! Half an hour later, she and I happened to be left alone together in the garden, and she said to me, "Bobby, did you ever hear of one Jessy Gwynne?"

I answered a little reticently that I had heard something about her.

"H'm," remarked the old woman, with a look that seemed to look me through and through.

"I believe," I explained, "that my great-uncle was once upon a time in love with her, and that it came to nothing. That was all."

"Yes—that was all," remarked the Countess in an odd tone. "But she had added, 'you are a baby. You are all babies now, I think. Did you ever read 'I'll n'a guere d'homme assez habile pour connaître tout le mal qu'il fait'? I dare say not. It is in a book you young people do not read."

When I went up stairs that evening with my uncle in the room he sat down, as he generally did, to talk a little before asking me to wind up his watch and to assist him to undress.

"A wonderful woman, Lady K., Bob!" he began. "There are no women like that now. There are no women like you this afternoon remark that observation of hers about great crimes, Bob?"

"I did," I replied, "but I cannot say that I understood it."

"Profound, Bob! profound!" said the old man. "Nine crimes out of ten, nephow, spring from men's ignorances; and how great are young people's ignorances! That is what young people never know; and there's the rub, Bob. That is what leads them into their great crimes—wrong against fathers and mothers, those who love them, and those whom they love best. You are five-and-twenty, Bob. Your great crime has been committed, or you will never commit one. Take an old man's advice; look well around you, and find out if you are being guilty. And if you have, redress it as well as you can, 'before it is too late.'"

Was there something, I wondered, on the old man's conscience? Had I heard at Northbrook only a part of the history of Jessy Gwynne? It was a long time ago. The next instant the old gentleman referred to the very subject which was occupying my thoughts.

"You remember our visit to Northbrook, Bob?" he said. "My crime—he spoke solemnly—'my crime was my conduct toward Miss Gwynne. It was no crime, you would say. I was nothing, nothing such as a man would reproach himself with, much less anything such as the world esteems wrong; but in my ignorance, in the ignorance of my youth, I did a thing that had consequences so awful. And I never knew it. Never suspected it, not once in seventy years. And that is just it, Bob—a man so seldom knows when he has been wise, and when he has been wicked."

He was silent a while, and I did not press him to explain himself. But presently he resumed his own account:

"Men's greatest crimes, Bob, are not those that they commit with their own

deliberation, nor those always to which the world has attached the most dreadful names, but those acts, followed by the cruellest results, which spring from the weakness of our characters, acts of which we are guilty without suspicion that we are doing wrong, and whose miserable consequences we are unable to foresee. My great-uncle has become long since miserable."

Again my uncle was a little while silent before he continued:

"The evening that I came home, Bob, after our stay in Berkshire—that evening that you left me by the dining-room fire—I had a vision. You will think that I am very old, and I begin to dote. Perhaps I do. But what I tell you is true.

"When you were all gone that evening I sat by the fire thinking of things that happened many years ago and of what Ann told us, and of our visit to Northbrook, and then, presently looking up, I found that some one had come to sit with me. The impression my visitor made upon my senses was vivid and distinct. I saw him clearly and could hear his tones, and I felt the difference when he stood between me and the fire. But I had a clear intuition that his presence was unreal; that what I saw was but a phantom creation of my own senses. So completely was I in my own mind, that I said to myself: 'I must be in worse health than I supposed, to be subject to illusions such as this.' But just as one says to oneself in a dream, 'This must be a dream, and yet one continues to dream on, so my illusion continued."

"I felt no surprise. The presence that was with me seemed to me natural—as natural as if your father had come in or you, only I wondered who my visitor was. He sat a little before me, nearer the fire, so that I only saw the back of his head and a part of his cheek. All the while I thought it was your grandfather, for the figure was not unlike his, and the clothes were such as he used to wear. At another time I thought it was Dick; but the hair was darker than his. But my visitor spoke."

"Shall we go back, William?" he said, "back to 1814, and go down again to Northbrook and see Jessy Gwynne?"

"His voice was familiar to me, very familiar. It was like Dick's voice, but it was not Dick's. Nor the voice of any one that I could remember."

"However, while trying to identify it, I had given some sort of assent to his proposition, and my visitor rose and stood with his back to the fire. After a long time I raised my eyes to him. It was myself. For a while I eyed him steadfastly, and then a sudden great shock passed through me, and I knew that I was again alone, but by my companion's face, and I knew nothing more until you came in that night. I had no idea that you had recently had made at Oxford, and I was in my 20th year. Below us, on the slope of a hill, lay a little country town, with its church tower peeping above some trees. It was Northbrook. We reached a stile, and I saw my grandfather. 'This is no doubt the stile,' so we crossed over the stile and took a path across the fields. 'Shall we find Miss Gwynne at home?' I asked. He did not know any more than I. Presently we came to a spot where there was a wicket gate—'you remember it.'"

"There is some one coming," said my companion. "A girl! Look!"

"Why, I answered, 'yes! No—yes! It is Miss Gwynne herself.' And my heart leaved me a great deal of joy."

"We met her just where the path reached the trees, and she and I shook hands, like lovers delighted to meet unexpectedly. For a few minutes we stood talking where we had met. The sun had set, and the stars were shining in the green leaves, and rooks cawed among their nests in the tall trees, and to me the whole world seemed to be flooded with happiness. But I soon learned with disappointment that Miss Gwynne was going and that my longed-for reunion and engagement could not be postponed. I offered to accompany her for a part of the way to her friend's house, and so turning back walked with her. I had brought her a little present from Oxford, and when we were within the wicket gate I gave it to her. At the gate we stood awhile talking, and she put her small foot upon the lowest bar of the gate. I thought that she accepted my present cordially, and I could not prevail upon her to let me accompany her, any further than the stile to the end of the meadows. There we said 'good-bye,' she telling me to go on to 'The Cottage.' Her father and mother would be glad to see me, and she would return home probably before I left."

Some years ago, European dress began to come into vogue in Japan for women as well as for men, but a reaction has set in. The Japanese women are not satisfied with the ordinary dress styles of civilization, but they are unwilling to return to their old dress, and hence they have been making a study of European dress, and imitating the various feminine dress reformers.

"All run down" from the weakening effects of warm weather, or a cold, or a good tonic and blood purifier like Hood's Sarsaparilla. Give this peculiar medicine a trial. Sold by all druggists.

Miss Lizzie Graft, of Jackson, Me., who died recently at the age of 43 years, was the mother of fourteen children, eleven of whom are living.

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"The time came when it was necessary for us to leave in order to catch the coach, and I made my adieux. Mrs. Gwynne bade me be sure to come again. Jessy said nothing, only 'Good-bye, Mr. Gilson, a little timidly.'"

"And my companion and I went back across the glebe meadow to meet the coach. 'So we have been to 'The Cottage' and seen Jessy Gwynne,' said he."

"Yes," I answered, slowly. My heart was very heavy. I had met Miss Gwynne the previous Christmas, and ever since I had been dreaming a young man's dream of pretty Jessy Gwynne."

"Shall you come to Northbrook again?" asked my companion.

"What is the good?" I replied.

"To hear with eyes belongs to love's fine wit; and I exhibited no love in the matter, but only the dullness of a boy, stupid with love; and because Jessy Gwynne was coy, I was clean disheartened. I see a little matter, does it not? But you shall hear."

"Now, for Bob," continued my uncle, after a little pause, "there is nothing very strange in my vision, or dream—unless it is its coherent vividness. It was all mere memory. For these are exactly the things that happened on the occasion of my visit to 'The Cottage,' and I shall never forget them. Only I went thither alone—at least—but perhaps you will understand presently."

"To my answer, 'What is the good?' my companion made no reply in words, but already the scene had again changed. We were no longer crossing the glebe meadows at Northbrook, we were nowhere in space, but the things that had happened at 'The Cottage' passed before us, seen and understood I cannot tell how. I saw Miss Gwynne watching for my coming. I knew her face, and I saw her eyes, and I saw her go out across the meadow, now in the bright summer mornings, and again in the autumn when the leaves were falling. Sometimes she would go out this way or that, and I would see her sweep on her return home. Much more than that, I was conscious of her thoughts; that she said in herself that I was unjust to desert her, only because she had once been coy. I saw and understood much

more than Ann told us. And then I perceived a change in Miss Gwynne. Gradually she thought less of me, and a stranger supplanted me in her affections, a man whose features I could never see. But she met him often, and I saw that from having loved me with a maiden's first timid love, she passed to a fond and ardent love with a woman's first great passion. Then I heard my companion speak again—

"Will you see the rest?"

"And I seemed, without speaking, to know it. I saw Mrs. Gwynne, and I saw her in the streets of London to go to me for help—for I was in town at that date, and she knew it; and I saw her turn back, saying to herself, 'He came to me when I first found love, and I thought I should love him for the lightest trifle, and what would he do for me now? I saw her with no covering on her head in the cold night, take the poison from her pocket and drink it at the stile where we had parted. I saw her stop at the wicket gate, where she had accepted my present, and say to herself, 'Oh, why did he never come back?' I saw her tapping at the kitchen shutter, already in the torments of death. And I saw her die. I saw her buried, too, by the third buttress of the church—not counting the wicket gate. And my uncle's voice dropped—'I saw her soul no covering on her head in the cold night, take the poison from her pocket and drink it at the stile where we had parted. I saw her stop at the wicket gate, where she had accepted my present, and say to herself, 'Oh, why did he never come back?' I saw her tapping at the kitchen shutter, already in the torments of death. And I saw her die. I saw her buried, too, by the third buttress of the church—not counting the wicket gate. And my uncle's voice dropped—'I saw her soul

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